Preparing a Portfolio

"The portfolio is a creative act, showing your skills and imagination, but it is also an act of communication and a tool for self-promotion. Demonstrate originality and inventiveness, but also accept the restrictions and conventions of professionalism, and show that you can get your ideas across in terms that working architects and designers can understand."
Harold Linton

PORTFOLIO DESIGN TIPS:

The typical portfolio has 20-40 pages. Resume and cover letter are optional (if mailing, send a cover letter, resume and design sheets) and the design can be coordinated with the portfolio.

Design a simple and understated enclosing system that doesn't detract from the layout and presentation of your own work. Use a consistent grid and font palette to give the portfolio a sense of unity and overall design. Carefully plan the sequence of projects. Storyboard the layout of the portfolio. Develop a narrative for explaining your work that is both logical and engaging.

Before you interview, spend some time thinking about a verbal presentation and which points are important to make. Be prepared to discuss any aspect of your work at an interview.

Be prepared for different length interviews. Some people may offer you an hour or more, others may offer only 10 - 20 minutes. Be able to adjust your verbal presentation to the varying time constraints, as well as the apparent or expressed interest of your audience.

Showing process sketches can add texture to your presentation. However, it is not necessary to supplement each project with sketches. Don't show anything you feel you need to explain or apologize for.

Original drawings or a sketchbook can offer a more intimate view of how you work and communicate graphically. Although not required or expected, they can be a powerful addition to an interview or portfolio.

You may want to create two portfolios: a complete one to bring to interviews and an abbreviated version (maximum 3-4 design sheets), featuring your strongest project(s) to send or leave with potential employers.

What to include in an employment portfolio:
Title page, design statement, including your interest, abilities, and direction in design (optional)
Resume, cover letter (optional)
Art / Architecture / Design studio course work
A selection of projects taken from previous or summer employment
Computer-Aided Design, drawing, Animation/Video Stills
CAD / Construction and technical documents
Undergraduate coursework (include only if work was award winning or highly specialized)
Original drawings or sketches (optional)

Consider Your Audience:

Graduate School - Research programs of the schools you feel reflect the type of architecture research/practice you are most interested in.

Professional Jobs - What type of firm? Traditional, small, large, alternative practice

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Demonstrate how you think, design is a process. Show process for at least one project.

What are you trying to communicate about yourself?
Show your ability to attractively package and present information concisely: Form is as important as content in a portfolio.
Illustrate your interests/agenda: Who are you?
Highlight your strengths in light of the position being filled
Demonstrate how you think
Organize/communicate ideas in graphic form

Compiling the Portfolio - Spend some time photographing or reducing work to fit a common format, one that allows flexibility and the ability to add and subtract work. Illustrate the scope of each project and then add examples of work you did on that project. Organize the work you show in some logical fashion (e.g., chronologically, by topic, or by media), but emphasize work relevant to the particular job.

Do an inventory of all your projects
Photograph/scan images and files**.** Get the best quality of images you can afford. You will be showing your work to people who recognize and appreciate high quality graphics. Impress them! Don't put yourself in the position of having to apologize for a "bad" print, photo, copy, etc. If you have work reproduced, do it correctly so your work is always seen at its best.
Edit projects and images: Include *only* the best projects!
Update or complete drawings/models/etc.
Provide enough information to evaluate each project
Develop fact sheet and short explanatory text for each project
Limit "life drawings" unless exceptional

Organization of portfolio and the sequence of projects
Cover and binding – Many books are judged by architects and others
Title page/TOC
Chronological / By project type
Best work first
Start with the most recent – first impressions count!
Consider flow, rhythm of presentation
Graphically distinguish one project from the next
Create a Mock-up or Storyboard
Consider the graphic relationship between sheets/projects
Provide a range of image sizes

Presentation
Repeat graphic devices/conventions (titles, text location, site plan, locations, north arrows, scales).
Format (Landscape or Portrait)**,** size
Type of papers (digital – traditional)
Binding and covers
Standard portfolios / Custom / Boxes / Folding plates
To template or not?
Balance continuity and variety between project sheets
Simplicity/elegance (i.e. avoid distracting graphics)
Lay out draft - Portfolios

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Get criticism/feedback from peers, professors, or the university to which you are applying
Leave enough time to revise
Save all files and continue to build Portfolio throughout your academic and professional career.

Custom fit: Jobs are often won or lost on first impressions. Rearranging a portfolio for an interview sends a clear signal that you are serious about working for a particular firm.

Where to find Resources
Rugg Road - Charles Street (homemade papers, vellums)**;** Paper Source - Porter Square area
Pearl – portfolios; Johnson's - Back Bay**;** Charrettes**;** Graphics Express/Spire Printing Service
Digital printing (Iris prints)

Examples of Portfolio Requirements

Cornell University: It should represent your best work, and consist mainly of photographic reproductions of original drawings and models. Photocopies of drawings and models are acceptable, but only if they are of excellent quality. Photographic slides are acceptable but may comprise no more than 20% of the total portfolio, or one page. Applicant's name, address, date and year must be clearly marked on the cover and any detachable parts. Contents of a submitted portfolio should measure no more than 8 1/2" x 11" in size.

University of California Berkeley: Twelve single or double-sided pages attached in one corner with a single staple; sheet dimensions should be no larger than 8 _ " x 11"; color or black & white photocopies/computer images; your name on the front or back of each sheet; presentation and layout of works is up to the applicant.

Princeton University: Applicants should prepare carefully to illustrate best their individual excellence as a designer. It should be bound into a brochure no larger than 9" by 12" (overall size). Applicants who hold the B. Arch. Degree should include in their portfolio at least five well-documented projects.

Portions of this handout were adapted from the Harvard GSD Career Services worksheet on portfolio design by Harold Linton Portfolio Design (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).
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The aim is to distinguish yourself!